

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASMARA 00147 171251Z

43

ACTION EB-07

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 3830

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0147

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID SWEL PINS ET

SUBJECT: QUESTIONS ON FOOD AND RELIEF SITUATION IN ERITREA

REF: ASMARA 123

1. FURTHER ANALYSIS OF SITUATION EXAMINED IN REFTTEL RAISES SEVERAL QUESTIONS WHICH ONLY EMBASSY ADDIS CAN ANSWER, AS INFORMATION SIMPLY NOT AVAILABLE IN ASMARA. FIRST, TO REVIEW, FOOD SITUATION IN RURAL AREA APPEARS TO BE ADEQUATE DESPITE PRODUCTION LOSSES DUE TO EPMG/INSURGENT HOSTILITIES; LOSSES WHICH DEFY EVEN BALLPARK ESTIMATION. SECOND, WE NOW KNOW THAT EPMG HAS SUBMITTED TO ADDIS ESTIMATE OF GRAIN NEEDS, EXCLUSIVE OF

PAGE 2 RUFTEFA5147 C O N F I D E N T I A L

LOCAL PRODUCTION, FOR URBAN ERITREAN POPULATION (LARGELY ASMARA) IN EXCESS OF 200,000 MT OR MORE THAN TWICE PREVIOUS ESTIMATES OF ANNUAL ERITREAN GRAIN SHORTFALL. THIRD, EPMG IS OBVIOUSLY UNWILLING TO PERMIT ANY SUBSTANTIAL EXPANSION OF
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PAGE 02 ASMARA 00147 171251Z

RELIEF ACTIVITIES IN ERITREA EVEN IF SUCH PROGRAMS COULD EASE

PROBLEM OF RECURRENT GRAIN SHORTAGES. EPMG ATTITUDE TOWARD EXPANSION RELIEF PROGRAM MAY BE RESULT ITS CONCERN THAT VOLAGS AND OTHER RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS WILL HASTILY TIRE OF URBAN PROGRAMS, AND SOON REQUEST PERMISSION TO OPERATE IN RURAL AREAFUWHERE EPMG NOW ENJOYS FREE HAND IN SUPPRESSING REBELS WITHOUT CONSTRAINTS WHICH PRESENCE OF FOREIGN OBSERVERS MIGHT IMPOSE.

2. COMMERCIAL REQUIREMENT FOR 200,000 MT OF GRAIN POSES FOLLOWING QUESTIONS: (A) WHAT IS EPMG REACTION AND INTENTION RE THIS STATED NEED; (B) DOES EPMG HAVE REQUIRED TRANSPORT CAPABILITY AND, IF SO, IS IT WILLING TO UTILIZE IT FOR THIS PURPOSE; AND (C) IS IT REALISTIC IN TERMS OF AVAILABLE SUPPLY OF COMMERCIAL GRAIN IN ETHIOPIA TO ANTICIPATE THAT ERITREAN NEEDS WILL BE MET? ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS ONLY AVAILABLE FROM GOVT AND COMMERCIAL SOURCES IN ADDIS. RELIEF REQUIREMENTS, ADMITTED

PAGE 3 RUFTEFA5147 C O N F I D E N T I A L

BY THE EPMG OR NOT, WOULD PRESUMABLY CONSTITUTE THAT PORTION OF THE 200,000 MT REQUIREMENT THAT IS NOT MET BY COMMERCIAL MEANS, PLUS THAT UNQUANTIFIABLE INCREMENT OF THE COMMERCIAL SUPPLY THAT THE NEEDY CANNOT AFFORD TO PURCHASE.

3. ACTION REQUESTED: CAN EMBASSY ADDIS, WITHOUT REVEALING ASMARA SOURCES, TRY TO GET A FIX ON PROBABLE ERITREAN RELIEF REQUIREMENTS WITH DISCREET USE OF INFORMATION WE HAVE OBTAINED. SHERRY

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